

SPEECH

BY

LT. GENERAL VERNON A. WALTERS

before

PITTSBURGH COUNCIL ON WORLD AFFAIRS

THE CIA AND WORLD AFFAIRS

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

10 December 1975

MORI/CDF

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I'm delighted to be here. In the old days we wouldn't have considered doing anything like this, but in the world we live in today, if we're going to function as an organization--which I think performs an essential function for the United States Government--we can't do it unless we have the support of the American people. We have no public relations campaign; we do not go out and seek invitations to talk, but if we get an opportunity to present our side of the story, for a change, we do not turn that opportunity down. And in a community as important as this: the World Affairs Council, with the prestige that this one has, I shrink with awe when I think of some of those who have spoken here in the not distant past. I am very happy to have this opportunity to come here and talk to you a little bit about the CIA and its role in world affairs.

People often ask me what is the fundamental purpose of the CIA, and if I could sum it up on one sentence, I would say: It is in order that the United States not be surprised.

Many years ago at Pearl Harbor we were surprised. We were able to survive and recover from a naval Pearl Harbor.

-2-

I just wonder if we could survive and recover from a nuclear Pearl Harbor. And so, our basic job is to make sure that the United States is not again taken by surprise.

A great deal of the atmosphere in which we move is related to the threat the American people feel. If the American people feel very threatened, they want many things to be done; if they do not feel threatened, they want many fewer things to be done and with a less degree of intensity. It is odd that today, there is not a great feeling of threat to the United States and yet, if you go on the basis of capabilities--I am not talking about intentions--today we have a situation that has not existed since the Revolution.

No nation since the Revolution has had the capability to strike the heart of the United States crippling or perhaps mortal blows. That capability is poised thirty minutes away from this room. I don't say they're going to use it, but it's there. One of our early Presidents said that, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." But he was talking about a country that had a two-month cushion on each side of it. In the old days the United States was regarded as unreachable and, therefore,

- 3 -

unbeatable. Unfortunately, that is no longer true. We are reachable; we are very much reachable. And so, we need, to a degree never felt in the past, intelligence about potential threats to our country.

It is the fundamental duty of every society to try and survive and enable its people to live in the kind of a society they have selected for themselves.

There is a great effort today--I would even describe it as a massive onslaught--on the intelligence community of the United States. There is a massive effort to try to make us believe that there is something immoral or un-American about intelligence. Well, intelligence has existed and been used from the very beginning of our history. Perhaps one of the greatest users of intelligence in our history was George Washington.

George Washington, in a letter to his chief of intelligence in New Jersey, Colonel Elias Drayton, in 1779 said this: "The need for procuring good intelligence is so obvious that I need add nothing further on this subject. All that remains is for me to tell you that these matters must be kept as secret as possible; for lack of secrecy, these enterprises, no matter how promising the outlook or well planned, generally fail. I am, sir, your obedient servant. G. Washington."

- 4 -

Now we live in an atmosphere which tells us you must tell everybody everything.

One day George Washington had spent the night at the home of a revolutionary sympathizer and as he was leaving, the sympathizer's wife said to him, "Oh, General, where do you ride tonight?" And he leaned down in the saddle and said, "Madame, can you keep a secret?" And she said, "Of course." And he said, "So can I. Good day, Madame." And rode on.

But now we're told this is cover-up, this is secrecy and we shouldn't be doing this because it isn't American. I would just like to make a few quotes from a few Presidents of the United States.

In our building there is a portrait of each President of the United States since our Agency was created in 1947. On Mr. Truman's he wrote, "To the CIA, a necessity to the President of the United States, from one who knows." President Eisenhower said, "Your activities have no aggressive intent but rather they are to assure the safety of the United States and the free world." Mr. Kennedy wrote, "You are destined to have your failures trumpeted and your successes passed unnoticed."

- 5 -

Intelligence is an activity which is distasteful to many. As a matter of fact, many of us regret the need for it, but we have to live in the real world. This is not a new feeling in America. Nathan Hale, before he went off on his mission behind the British lines, in a breach of security told a friend that he was going to do this and the friend looked at him aghast and said to him, "How could you stoop so low?"

So this kind of view is not a new one. Incidentally, outside the CIA we have a statue of Nathan Hale. I was not in favor of putting it there. I think he was a very noble and very brave young man, but any agent who gets caught on his first mission and has all the evidence on him, I am not sure he's what we should be holding up to our young trainees.

But, nonetheless, the fact is that we live in the real world where we need it. We need intelligence; but what is intelligence? Well, intelligence is vital information, vital information of a military, political, economic nature, painstakingly collected, painstakingly analyzed, and disseminated to the people in the United States who have to make the decisions in timely fashion.

-6-

because if you don't do it in timely fashion it isn't intelligence, it's history.

In the earlier years of the United States what happened abroad affected us relatively little. For instance, a whole new era of economic intelligence has come into being. In the old days, economic intelligence was part of a military capability study. It wasn't anything in itself. But today, with the billions of petrodollars and billions of Eurodollars moving around the world in ways that can affect the livelihood of American workmen in Pittsburgh or Houston or any other place in the United States, we must do what other nations have done in the past.

Now we Americans have always had this feeling about intelligence. To give you an idea: in 1942 I was transferred out of my military unit in Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and taken to the United States Army Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie where we were training people in intelligence. The Commanding Officer of the U.S. Army Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie was a British colonel. That was the state of preparedness of American intelligence.

- 7 -

In each of our wars we've developed a superb intelligence capability. At the end of each of our wars we've gone about dismantling it. We wound up World War I with an excellent intelligence establishment. We demolished it thereafter. This time, because of the Korean and Vietnamese War, it took longer for the wreckers to get to work; but the wreckers are at work. They will not succeed because I think the American people fundamentally understand that the real issue before them is not the alleged misdeeds that occurred a quarter of a century ago or twenty years ago, the real issue before the American people is: will the United States have eyes and ears to see and hear as it moves into the last quarter of this century or will we stumble into those last 25 years deaf and blind until the day we have to choose between nuclear blackmail and abject humiliation.

We have made a number of mistakes as a people, but I think the existence of our nation, what it is today, makes quite plain that the American people over the longer period of time are a very wise people.

Now why do we need this intelligence; what do we see facing us? We see the Soviet Union deploying at the present time four new types of inter-continental ballistic missiles of a brand new generation; we see them building



- 8 -

larger submarines able to launch more intercontinental missiles; we see them building large aircraft with a capability against the United States; we see them upgrading their conventional forces, their army divisions, their conventional naval forces to a tremendous degree. We see four million people under arms in the Soviet Union. We see the Soviet Union spending more money on its defense establishment than the United States, out of a gross national product less than half of ours, which means it's a far greater effort.

We see these things in the Soviet Union. We see the beginnings of them in the Chinese Peoples Republic. And really the four great questions that I regard as essential for the CIA to try and answer are: who will be in control of the Soviet Union five years from today and what will their disposition be regarding us and regarding our allies and the rest of the world; what is there in Soviet scientific research and development today that will impact on us five or ten years from now; and the same questions arise for the Chinese Peoples Republic. They are behind the Soviets and they are behind us, but they, too, are moving in all of these fields.

We have something else we have to watch. We have to watch nuclear proliferation. Many people who

-9-

in the past may have trusted U.S. guarantees--and this is one of the prices for leaving Vietnam that I think a lot of people have not thought about. Some of those people may feel they have to defend themselves by their own means and this may lead them to seek to develop nuclear weapons.

Now nuclear weapons are a threat to all mankind and this is going to be something we are going to have to watch even more vigilantly in the future than in the past.

How did we get the CIA in the first place? Well, the last great investigation of this type that we had was in 1945-46 when Congress looked into Pearl Harbor, how it happened and why. That investigation lasted seven months and was filled with recriminations and accusations. And they came to the conclusion that actually there was enough intelligence in the various parts of the U. S. Government to have at least lessened the impact of Pearl Harbor if not to have avoided it. But each person who had it--whether it was Army, Navy, or State, or FBI, was squirreling their own little piece of intelligence away. There was no central point to which these could have been brought, and this was what led to the creation in the National Security Act of 1947 of the Central Intelligence Agency. It was

- 10 -

part of the re-structuring of the whole U.S. defense effort and this is why the oversight committees of the Congress that have oversight over us in these matters are basically the Armed Services Committees and of course the Appropriations Committees and, to some degree, the Government Operations Committees; and the Foreign Relations Committees. Now from our oversight committees we have no secrets; there is no question that we will not answer to them. And I must say that as far as our own oversight committees are concerned, we have never had any leaks. This Congressional oversight is a unique American phenomenon. We are the only nation in the world in which the Congress oversees the intelligence service, except for Western Germany and theirs was modeled on ours after World War II. Now we can live perfectly comfortably with this; we can live with any form of oversight the Congress chooses to adopt. We can live with any guidelines they choose to adopt. Now what guidelines did they give us in the 1947 Charter? They said that we would collect intelligence and, quote: do such other things as the National Security Council may direct. Unquote. They gave us no further guidelines. Now the Congress created us knowing full well that among other things we would engage in espionage,

-11-

but they didn't want to say it in writing. In my opinion they won't want to say it in writing tomorrow either. They won't want to take that kind of a responsibility. But this is the Charter that they gave us.

Now, as the perceptions of the American people of the threat changed, so did their perceptions, as I mentioned, of what they wanted done.

Not long ago we had a group of people from the Hill out at our Agency and the question of assassinations came up. And someone said, "Well, if anybody could have assassinated Hitler in '44 or '45, he would undoubtedly have been the first joint recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor and the Victoria Cross." One of the young gentlemen from the Hill said, "Yes, but if you could have gotten him in '35 or '36, think how many lives you would have saved." And I said, "Congressman, are you advocating assassination in peace time?" "Oh," he said, "no, that's different." Well, that's the whole issue--it's different because then they were scared and they wanted their enemies done away with at any cost.

Personally, my own feeling about assassination is that it's wrong on three counts: it's against the law of God; it's against the law of man; and, it doesn't work. Bullets kill only men, never ideas. And it's a futile exercise.

-12-

You've heard all about the assassination report and all the allegations concerning us concerning the assassination report. What almost didn't get mentioned-- at least it was mentioned--is that nobody got assassinated. It's just like the toxins we were supposed to have stored away. It also came out they were never used on anybody.

Now one may ask: why were these things discussed. The staff of any nation in the world has what is known as "contingency plans"--what they will do in case they have to invade one of their neighbors. They may have no intention whatever of invading their neighbors, but you draw up contingency plans for everything. Someone took one of these contingency plans and said, "Did your general staff draw this up?" "Yes." "Was it approved by the head of your general staff?" "Yes." "Was it approved by your Minister of Defense?" "Yes." "Aha! Then you intended to invade this country."

In regard to the drugs, for instance. Why did we test the drugs? Well I think you have to go back to the environment of the times. We saw around the early 1950s a man like Cardinal Mindzenty in Hungary who had resisted every threat, every torture, every imprisonment by the Nazis, bravely and boldly. Suddenly he appeared hollowed-eyed to confess everything his Communist masters wanted

-13-

him to confess. I thought, and I think most people who remember that time thought, that this was done with mind-bending drugs. We were afraid these would be used on our people--our diplomats, our armed forces--we had to know something about it and be able to retaliate. So we studied this. Not just the CIA or the armed forces. Many of the most distinguished institutions of learning in the United States didn't see anything wrong with experimenting in this area.

The toxins. Several times the Soviets killed Russian emigres in Western Germany by using these toxins. Here again was the question: how do we defend ourselves against this and how do we retaliate if they are used on us? So there was study of this, but the toxins were never used. In fact, we discovered the toxins back in the bottom of some old building and we were the ones who told the Congress that these were there.

So you have all of these things that could be given publicity--adverse--to the basic mission of our organization which is to collect the intelligence that could prevent the United States from being surprised. I might add in passing that the United States prior to World War II had undertaken not to use poison gas. This did not prevent

-14-

the United States from having several million poison gas shells to use for retaliation in case it was used against us.

A foreigner said to me the other day, "You Americans are a great people, but I think the least attractive trait of your national character is a certain pharisaical quality which says, 'Oh, all that dirty stuff is all right for the dirty old British, Russians, French, Germans, but not for us pure Americans; we don't do that sort of thing.'" Well, in this Bicentennial Year I've done a little research on what we have done in the past and you'd be surprised. George Washington mounted three separate attempts to kidnap Benedict Arnold, and I think we all know what he would have done with him. George Washington mounted an attempt to kidnap Prince William of Britain-- the third son of George III who was a midshipman in New York in 1782. Benjamin Franklin, for three years before the Revolution, when we were all loyal subjects of George III, was the Assistant Postmaster of British North America. You know what he was doing? He was opening that British mail like crazy. When they caught him and fired him, he joined the Revolution and he went to Paris as the representative of the American Revolution.

-15-

While he was there he designed and had the French build him a special printing press. Do you know what he printed on the printing press? British currency, British passports and fabricated atrocity stories.

You hear all about this terrible thing about political action. Just how does anybody think we got Texas or California? And when they're condemning political or covert action, I would advise most Americans not to be too enthusiastic about this. After all, if the French hadn't had 17,000 men ashore in North America before they declared war on Great Britain, I'm not positive we would be celebrating our Bicentennial this year.

The first proprietary, which is the so-called companies that are owned by intelligence services--the first one of which we have record in history, was a corporation called Hortalaz Corporation which was founded by Benjamin Franklin and Monsieur de Beaumarchais who was the author of The Barber of Seville and The Marriage of Figaro. The purpose of this corporation was to buy arms clandestinely for the American revolutionaries in France and in Spain. So we have a great idea that we didn't do any of this stuff in the past and it just is not historically correct.

A nation must survive. We don't want to rival other nations by using Hitlerite methods or anything else.



-16-

But the simple fact is that if you're fighting with a man and he is using brass knuckles and you're trying to fight by the Marquis of Queensbury rules, you just may not win that fight.

We hope for the guidelines from Congress, but we hope the Congress will give us guidelines that will have some mechanism for change as the perception of the American people of what is right and what should be done in their defense changes.

Today, thank God, you can't run a segregated school in the United States. Twenty years ago you could; and forty years ago, if you tried to run any other kind of school, you would have been in deep trouble.

If we persist in looking at yesterday through the eyes of today, we will not only misunderstand the past, we will misunderstand the present and the future.

Just one word on the past transgressions. The Rockefeller Report, the part which is not much quoted, said, "A detailed analysis of the facts has convinced this Commission that the great majority of the CIA's domestic activities comply with its statutory authority. The Agency's own actions undertaken for the most part in '73 and '74, before these hearings began, have gone far

-17-

to terminate the activities upon which the investigation was focused."

We are spending all this time on the Fifties and Sixties. Your freedom and mine is going to be decided in the late Seventies and early Eighties. I can't tell you that we haven't done things we shouldn't have done, that we haven't engaged in certain questionable activities; but if you consider that through our Agency have passed 50,-60,-70,000 people in the last 27 years, if you put our record up against that of any town of 50,-60,-70,000 people, or if any other organization in the U.S. Government was submitted to the kind of scrutiny that we were submitted to, I submit that we would not look quite as horrible as we are portrayed.

Another great thing we have is that we alternate between periods of "we're the greatest; we're the strongest" and periods of "we're the worst, and everything we do is bad" and so forth and so on. The head of a friendly European service said to me the other day, "You know, I always used to think that the Flagellantes and the Penitentes were small religious sects in Arizona and New Mexico, but," he said, "now I see huge colonies of them flourishing all over the Eastern seaboard."

Some people think that everybody's going to look at this and say, "Isn't this great? Look at the Americans

-18-

exposing all of these things, nobody else would do it, what a fine system they have, what a great people they are."

The reaction I get abroad is: "How can you be this naive? How can you be this stupid? You're not denigrating the CIA, you're denigrating the United States." The same man said to me, "Don't you have a law in America against indecent exposure, against taking off your clothes in public?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Tell me, why do you practice internationally what you prohibit domestically?"

I'm not an old CIA man. I came there three and one-half years ago and I must tell you that I marvel at the people there. They are Americans just like other Americans and they live by the same standards. There is an attempt today to create a new caste of untouchables in the United States: people who work in intelligence who are unfit for association with other human beings and should be given no employment after they leave there. And we see people doing everything they can to foster this kind of discrimination. Well, all I can tell you is that I see these people under a bombardment that has no equal in American history--I don't think the worst part of the McCarthy time was anything like this. These people continue every day to produce what I believe to be the finest intelligence in the world.

Now, they have published some of our post-mortems that we've put out on intelligence failures. We are the ones

-19-

who did those post-mortems; we weren't directed to do them. We realized that we had failed here or there or in another place, and we made these studies. Unfortunately, we do not do post-mortems of our successes. I have suggested to our Director that we undertake now some post-mortems of our successes so the next time we're asked, we can produce these.

Well, we live in a world where we all have hope that detente will lead to a true lessening of tensions between the Soviet Union and ourselves. But we must live in a real world and without illusions.

There was an amusing Russian story that was told about two young Americans who went to Moscow and were being taken around by a young Soviet and he took them to visit the Kremlin, and the Cathedral of Basil the Blessed, and the University on the Lenin Hills. Finally he took them to the zoo. And here in a large cage they found a Russian bear-- a huge Russian grizzly bear--and a small rather worried-looking lamb who appeared to be in good shape. And they thought it was odd to put these two in the same cage and they said to the young Russian, "Why do you do this?" "Oh," he said, "this is to prove that peaceful co-existence is possible." "Well," the young American said, "it's pretty impressive" and his buddy said, "it sure is

-20-

convincing." The young Russian looked around and seeing no one, he said, "Of course, you understand, every morning we have to put in a new lamb." Then he added a second, cruel, punchline: "For a nation of sheep, this should not be difficult." So we have to watch this.

Another one which was told to me by the head of another friendly European service, which I think is really a great story to illustrate a little bit this puritanical "Lord I thank thee that I am not as other people like that publican over there" and adulterer and so forth. This story is about the cannibals on an island in the Pacific who captured a Frenchman, an Englishman and an American. The King of the cannibals said to them, "I have bad news and good news for you. The bad news is that I am going to eat you all for lunch tomorrow and you're going to be executed in the morning. And after that you need some good news and the good news is that I'll give you anything you want short of setting you free. So he turned to the Frenchman and he said, "What do you want?" And the Frenchman said, "Well, if I'm going to be executed in the morning I think I would just as soon spend the remaining time with that beautiful cannibal girl over there." They said okay and they untied the Frenchman and he

- 21 -

and the cannibal girl went off in the woods. Then they said to the Englishman, "What do you want?" The Englishman said, "I want a pen and paper." They said, "What do you want a pen and paper for?" He said, "I want to sit down and write a letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations and protest against the unfair, unjust, and unsporting attitude you have adopted towards us." So they untied the Englishman, they gave him a hut and pen and paper. Then they said to the American, "What do you want?" The American said, "I want to be led into the middle of the village, I want to be made to kneel down, and I want the biggest cannibal here to kick me in the rear end." They said, "That's a very odd request but the Americans are a very odd bunch and since we promised, okay." So they led the American into the middle of the village, they made him kneel down, the biggest cannibal took a running leap, kicked the American in the rear end and knocked him ten feet. Now the American had been hiding a submachine gun under his clothes and at this point, he took it out and he shot down the local cannibals and the rest fled. The Frenchman hearing the gunfire came out of the woods; the Englishman hearing the gunfire came out of the hut. They looked at the American and they said, "Do you mean to say you had that gun the whole time?" The American

- 22 -

said, "Sure." They said, "Well, why the heck didn't you use it before now?" And this is the foreigner telling me the story, he said, "The American looked at them with an expression of deep sincerity and he said, 'but you don't understand, it wasn't until they kicked me in the rear end that I had any moral justification for this sort of thing.'"

Well, every day when I go to work I walk by, at the entrance of our building, a series of stars cut in the stone and they commemorate the people of the Central Intelligence Agency who have fallen in the performance of their duties, and they have died for your freedom and mine as surely as anybody who lies in a military cemetery. And across from them there is the coat of arms of the Central Intelligence Agency which contains a quotation from the Bible which says, 'Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.' But in the world in which we live today I am not sure that shouldn't be changed to: You must know the truth for only the truth will keep you free.

My generation was told by Winston Churchill that the only companions we would have on our journey would be "blood, and sweat, and tears, and toil." As we

- 23 -

journey into this last quarter of the century, I think all of the men and women who work at the Central Intelligence Agency hope that we will have three companions on our journey: Faith, which lights the road ahead, for dark is the road of the man who walks without faith; Enthusiasm, which moves the young and keeps the older young; and, finally, Courage, which is the greatest virtue of all because it is the guarantee of all the others. If we do not have the courage to face up to what must be done to ensure the survival of this nation, because this nation is not a status quo nation like the Soviet Union which wants to maintain things as they are. There is in this nation all the mechanism for bringing about all the change that we need to make. The only thing is we want to make that change ourselves; we don't want to have it imposed upon us.

I can only say that after the three and one-half years I have been at the Central Intelligence Agency, if I were asked to sum up my feelings, I would sum them up in one word: reassurance. Reassurance at the competence, reassurance at the continuity, and most of all reassurance at the people I find there. We do not attempt to have a



- 24 -

crystal ball and predict that on the 17th of October, this, that, or the other is going to happen. Our basic task is to try to broaden the understanding of the people who make the decisions in the United States as to what must be done if this nation is to survive as a free nation.

We have many shortcomings. Sometimes I think we tend to exaggerate them ourselves. If you look at our history, our nation fought a number of great wars in this century. We have not taken any territory; we have not compelled anybody to become an American citizen who did not want to; there is no parallel in recorded human history for the effort this nation has made to help those it has defeated. This nation is the only nation in history that has ever financed its competitors back into competition. We have shortcomings; but I don't think we should let them blind us. I think all of us understand that we live in a society which is the result of our national experience; we wish to move ahead in that society; we wish above all else to keep peace in order that our people may enjoy the fruits of our work. But if we are not vigilant that opportunity will not be given to us. We must never let our nation be surprised. This is the charge that weighs heavily on us.

-25-

This is not an easy time. It reminds me of a poem I once read which said, "It is not difficult in good days to carry the flag forward before the proud ranks. Only when the storm blows and the flag is in tatters do the empty and the weak fall by the roadside and the true and the loyal show themselves as such." This is such a time for us.

People often ask me, "How are people taking this at the Agency?" Well, what I must tell you is that they continue to do their work and do it superbly. We have four times as many people applying to work with us-- young people coming out of the universities--as at any time in the past. The older people we were worried about because they've lived all their lives in anonymity and silence. We thought they couldn't stand it. We have had less requests for resignation than in almost any year in the past.

Mr. Truman once said, "If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen." I, who am not an old CIA man, never cease to marvel at how many kitchen volunteers we have who, through this torrent of mud and accusations and innuendos of all sorts, continue to serve our nation silently, in comradeship and in partnership, with those who also work in the field of intelligence--with whom

- 26 -

we work very closely and not in compartmented fashion as some people would tell you--in Defense, the FBI, in Treasury, in State, and all those other people who have some part in making sure that our country is neither blind nor deaf.

I am proud to be associated with such people. I believe that the way they have been portrayed to us as a threat to our freedom is a great dis-service to the people who serve the United States anonymously, and very much without visible rewards.

One might think that one would have reason to be a pessimist; but if you look at the whole recorded history of mankind in 6,000 years of which we have record, the whole flow of human development has been in the direction of greater freedom and dignity for the human individual. Many tyrants in the past have stopped that flow temporarily. None has ever stopped it permanently. I do not believe that the various modern tyrannies under the various forms of Communism will escape the inexorable laws of history. I believe that we have just begun.

Not long ago I was in Taiwan. They took me through the Museum of Natural History of China. And my guide was a young girl, a Chinese University student, who spoke good English, and at the end she said, "What do you think of all this?" And I said, "It leaves me thoughtful as I

-27-

contemplate the 6,000 years of your history compared to the 200 years of our history." And she smiled and she said, "Yes, that is only half a dynasty, isn't it?" I said, "Yes, but in that half a dynasty we went from an empty continent to walk alone the silent face of the moon."

So while we have storms and while we have difficulties, I have no doubt that the greatest period of our nation's history lies ahead, not behind us.

Thank you very much.